

**Diverse Deutsch:  
The Dialects of the German Language**

**By Natalie N. Short  
Advisor Dr. Ronald C. Warner  
Summer 2008**

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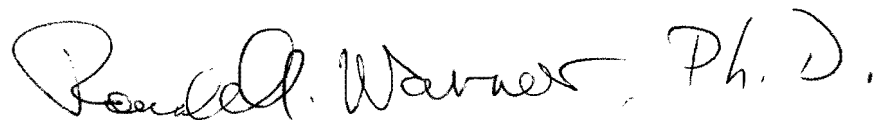
An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

Natalie Short

Thesis Advisor

Dr. Ron Warner

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ronald A. Warner, Ph.D.". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "R" and "W".

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Muncie, Indiana

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## Introduction

German (or *Deutsch*) is the official language of the Federal Republic of Germany, Austria, Liechtenstein, and the majority of Switzerland, totaling approximately 91 million native-speakers. In addition, there are German-speaking communities throughout Western and Eastern Europe (West: Belgium, Alsace-Lorraine/France, South Tyrol/Italy; East: Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia, Romania) as well as smaller communities in former German colonies such as Namibia and Cameroon (Eisenberg 10). Throughout the large and smaller areas in which German is spoken, the everyday speech varies greatly due to the use of dialects.

A dialect can be defined as “the systematic differences in the way different groups speak a language” (Fromkin 409). Everyone speaks a dialect, and in the main German-speaking realm of Germany, Switzerland, and Austria, dialects are a result of the varying languages of the West Germanic tribes (the Franks, Saxons, Hermunduri or Thuringians, Alemanni, Suebi or Swabians, and Bavarians) that originally settled in the areas which are now Austria, Switzerland, and Germany (west of the Rhine, Elbe and Saale rivers). These dialects were already in place during the reign of Charlemagne and then slightly condensed after the Second World War. Dialects in other German-speaking regions of the world are a result of colonization and emigration from various parts of this region, as well as linguistic influences from neighboring languages (Eisenberg 10). While neighboring dialects are often similar and always understandable, more distant dialects are often unintelligible, even by native speakers. Due to the widespread use of dialects, it

was necessary to create a standard language that could be understood by all users of German. The standard pronunciation of German is based on the standard written language (Eisenberg 349). Despite standardization, there is a large number of 'multi-lingual' native-speakers who speak the standard language as well as regional variations of German (Wolff, Gerhard 137).

Given the regional variations in the language, German can be a difficult language to learn and use for the 18 million people worldwide who are studying it as a foreign language and who are often only familiar with the standard language (Eisenberg 349). The majority of this paper will be devoted to analyzing the phonetic, orthographic, and stylistic differences between standard High German and a selection of the most prevalent regional dialects, mainly *Bairisch*, *Schwäbisch*, *Sächsisch*, *Westfälisch*, and *Berlinisch*. By gaining a better understanding of the differences and becoming more aware of the linguistic variations of the language, it will be easier for non-native speakers to communicate with the German-speaking world.

## Map of Current German Dialects, Figure 1



Map from the “Atlas deutscher Sprache” (<http://lexikon.meyers.de/meyers/Mundart>)



## High German, the Standard Language

The German language is divided into two main dialect groups, Low German (*Niederdeutsch* or *Plattdeutsch*) and High German (*Hochdeutsch*). Geographically, High German is generally found in southern Germany where it is more mountainous (hence the term 'High' German), and Low German is found in the north where the landscape is flat or *platt*. Linguistically, dialects are largely separated by having been influenced by the High German Consonant Shift (*Zweite oder Hochdeutsche Lautverschiebung*) (Eisenberg 10).

The High German Consonant Shift originally occurred between the Sixth and Eleventh Centuries (Eisenberg 349). Since the standard language is based on High German which, by definition, has been affected by this linguistic shift, it will only be necessary to provide a detailed discussion of the High German Consonant Shift in the section discussing the Low German dialects that differ from the standard language because they were not affected by the linguistic shift (see Page 17).

Today, Standard High German is the form of the German language that is taught in schools throughout Germany, Austria, and Switzerland as well as in foreign language classrooms around the world. It is read in newspapers and magazines, heard on the radio and television, and universally understood throughout the German-speaking realm. Despite being considered the standard language, the High German dialects often vary

from Standard High German to the point that they are difficult for even native-speakers to understand. This paper will discuss two High German dialects, Bairisch and Schwäbisch.

## Bairisch

Bairisch is a High German dialect that is spoken, as its name implies, in many regions of Bavaria, such as in Upper Bavaria and Lower Bavaria, and also in the Upper Palatinate (*Oberpfalz*). In addition, it is heard in regions of Austria and South Tyrol (in northern Italy) (Zehetner 6). While the Bairisch dialect varies throughout this realm, the dialect saturation is so extensive that outsiders often believe that it is the official language of Bavaria; the dialect is frequently used by politicians as well as heard on Bavarian radio and television programs (Zehetner 6). The Bairisch dialect commonly spoken in Upper Bavaria, near Munich, is the dialect which is phonetically closest to the Standard High German.

Similar to the Bavarian people, the Bairisch dialect is very conservative (Wolff, Roland 17). While there is some Latin and French influence on the Bairisch vocabulary, the dialect prefers traditional southern German expressions to foreign and even Standard High German terminology (Bekh 18). Speakers of Bairisch eat *Kukumer* (from the Latin, *cucumis*, or ‘cucumber’) not *Gurke* and push their children around in a *Schaesn* (from the French *chaise* or ‘chair’) not a *Kinderwagen* (Bekh 20). The Bairisch orthography includes many traditional words. For instance, a ‘girl’ in Bairisch is called a *Deandl* or a *Dindl* rather than a *Mädchen*, and a *Junge* (‘boy’) is referred to as a *Bub(e)* (Wolff, Roland 16-17). Southern Germany (including Bairisch, Schwäbisch, and Alemannisch dialect regions) even has its own greeting, *Grüß Gott* or *Grias God*, as it would be commonly pronounced in Bavaria (Mehe).

Bairisch has two main vowels, *a* and *o*. The diphthong *ei* is often voiced *ao*. For example, *ich heiße* ('I am called') would be articulated *I hoas* (omitting the *ch*, or phonetically *ç*, from *ich* is also typical Bairisch pronunciation). It is important to realize this is not a completely consistent vowel substitution. Similar to the previous example, *ich weiß* ('I know') would be pronounced *I woas*, but the color white or *weiß* maintains its Standard High German pronunciation *weiß* (Mehe). Also, the diphthong *oi* (usually written in German as *eu* or *äu*) is often spoken like *ei*; therefore, *Häuser* ('houses') is spoken *Heisa*. In addition to such alternative vowel pronunciations, Bairisch-speakers tend not to use the German umlaut; therefore, the words *Glück* ('luck'), *hübsch* ('pretty'), *Brüder* ('brother'), and *Käse* ('cheese') are voiced *Gligg*, *hibsch*, *Briada*, and *Kas*. The verb phrase *ich möchte* ('I would like') would also have a more palatal pronunciation *I mecht* (Wolff, Roland 55).

The previous example also depicts one of the many grammatical eccentricities of Bairisch. It is often common to omit the *-e* ending in the Bairisch dialect. This would also apply to adjective endings (Wolff, Roland 55). In addition, speakers of Bairisch tend to conjugate their verbs differently. The second person plural verb form often ends with an *s*. For example, the verb phrase *ihr kommt* ('you plural') is often worded *es kemmts* (Mehe). In addition to altered verb forms, Bairisch grammar has no genitive case (Bekh 42). The genitive case is designed to designate ownership. In Standard High German, *Schmidts Laden* or *der Laden des Schmidts* means 'Schmidt's store,' but since there is no genitive case in Bairisch (even with proper nouns), then 'Schmidt's store' would be *der Laden*

*von dem Schmidt* or *der Laden vom Schmidt* ('the store of Schmidt). Bairisch-speakers tend to utilize the dative preposition *von* ('from' or 'of') to indicate ownership (Bekh 42). In other instances, they omit the preposition and simply place the noun taking ownership in the dative case followed by the corresponding possessive pronoun and the noun which is being possessed (from the previous example, *dem Schmidt sein Laden*).

This altered genitive case is just one example of the many eccentricities of the Bairisch dialect. Bavaria, where Bairisch is often spoken, is a state that is proud of its traditions, culture, and language.

## Schwäbisch

As seen on the map in Figure 1, Schwäbisch is a southern German dialect that is spoken in a large part of Baden Württemberg and in some eastern parts of Bavaria. Although the dialect was at one time considered village prattle, Schwäbisch has many soothing and pleasant qualities that have grown on the rest of the German-speaking community. Today it ranks as Germany's most alluring dialect (Vogt 5). People in this region, regardless of their economic and social status, are proud of their dialect. A common saying here is: "*wir können alles – außer Hochdeutsch*" ('we can do everything – except Standard High German'). Schwäbisch varies greatly from the Standard High German: The dialect is used by a majority of the population; it has many phonetic eccentricities, its own grammatical rules, and thousands of unique words; therefore, it is often encountered by outsiders ("Akzentfrei schwätze: Schwäbisch für Reifschmeckte").

Schwäbisch also shares some phonetic characteristics with Bairisch. Umlauts are spoken less rounded and more palatal, *schön* ('pretty'), *früh* ('early'), and *König* ('king') are pronounced *scheen*, *frih*, and *Keenich*. Another similarity to its neighboring dialect Bairisch is the tendency to pronounce the diphthong *oi* (written *äu* or *eu* in German) like *ei*, so phrases like *neun Häuser* ('nine houses') are spoken like *nein Heiser*. Phonetic differences that Schwäbisch does not share with Bairisch include adding diphthongs, pronouncing the long *u* in words like *gut* ('good') like a *ua*, *guat*, and always pronouncing the consonant *s* like *sch* (this sound is represented phonetically by the

phoneme □) (Wolff, Roland 57). Here is an example combining many of these phonetic eccentricities:

Standard High German:      *die Mutter ist müde.*

Schwäbisch:                      *dia Muader ischt miad.*

Englisch:                        ‘the mother is tired.’

(“Akzentfrei schwätze: Schwäbisch für Reifschmecke”)

In this case, the speaker has spoken the diphthong *ua* and *ia* instead of the umlauts. Also, the *s* in *ist* is post-aveolar; it is shushed instead of hissed.

Grammatically, speakers of Schwäbisch tend to leave out a lot. Like Bairisch, Schwäbisch has no genitive case. Instead, ownership in Schwäbisch is generally shown by presenting the object taking ownership in the dative case followed by the object being owned and the corresponding possessive pronoun. For instance, *das Haus meines Vaters* or ‘my father’s house’ would be formed *meim Vattr sei Haus* (“Akzentfrei schwätze: Schwäbisch für Reifschmecke”). As seen here, it is also common to omit the ending *-n* (Wolff, Roland 57); otherwise, this example would read *meinem Vattr sein Haus*. In addition to omitting the verb and adjective ending *-n*, Schwäbisch also often omits the prefix *ge-*, therefore, *broche* means *gebrochen* (the past participle of ‘to break’) and *komme* means *gekommen* (the past participle of ‘to come’) (Wolff, Roland 57). In general, Schwäbisch-speakers skip over many consonants in their effort to allow the language to flow gently. *Hast du* (‘do you have’) is articulated *hosch*, *unangenehm* (‘unpleasant’) is *o’a’gneem*, and *gewesen* (the past participle of ‘to be’) is *gwae* (Vogt 6).

Such pronunciations are common in Schwäbisch, making the dialect difficult for even native speakers of Standard High German to understand.

Adding to these difficulties in understanding, there are a large number of orthographic differences. Some Standard High German words have completely different meanings. For instance, *Teppich* or ‘carpet’ is strictly used to refer to a table cloth in the Swabian region. Other vocabulary is also strictly Schwäbisch. Swabians refer to their neighbors who come from other regions of the country as *Reischmeckte*. They share their common greeting, *Grüß Gott*, with their Bavarian neighbors, but they say *En Guade* before meals instead of the typical *Guten Appetit* (‘good appetite’) (“Akzentfrei schwätze: Schwäbisch für Reischmeckte”). Swabians also tend to overuse the diminutive suffix *-le*. The suffix not only replaces the standard *-chen* and *-lein*, but they diminutize words that would not usually be diminutized, for instance, the imperative *Jetzette!* (formed from *jetzt* or ‘now’) or unpleasant events such as a *Schlägle* (‘fender bender’) (Vogt 5).

Schwäbisch can be difficult to understand, but it is also an essential part of the culture. Despite differing greatly from Standard High German, it has left its mark on the German-speaking world by being the dialect of many of the influential ruling families like the Stauffers, Welfens, Hohenzollerns, and Habsburgers (“Akzentfrei schwätze: Schwäbisch für Reischmeckte”).



## **Sächsisch**

Sächsisch is a Middle German dialect. The Middle German dialect group is a sub-group of High German, but it differs with regard to the High German Consonant Shift. Sächsisch and other Middle German dialects are only partially affected by this linguistic shift. As its name indicates, the Sächsisch dialect originally developed in Saxony between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Centuries AD. Although the dialect is generally disliked today, it once held much economic and cultural prestige (Eisenberg 11), and when Martin Luther translated the Bible in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, he translated it in the German dialect with which he was most familiar, Sächsisch. Luther's translation of the Bible in the Sächsisch dialect not only promoted the spread of this dialect; it also had a huge influence on the development of the German written language (Wolff, Gerhard 59). Today, Sächsisch is mainly spoken in the eastern German states of Thuringia and Saxony, but it can also be heard in southern Saxony-Anhalt and southeast Lower Saxony (Lins 6).

Standard High German is based largely on the Sächsisch dialect (Bergmann 5). Although the dialect has some influence from the nearby Bohemian, Polish, and Slavic regions, the orthographic and stylistic characteristics of Sächsisch are quite similar to the standard language (Lins 5). However, the dialect varies greatly due to its relaxed and melodious pronunciation. This pronunciation along with a tendency to phonetically switch certain consonants leads to problems in communication, even with other native German speakers (Lins 5).

There is a widespread weakening of consonants in the Sächisch dialect. As a matter of fact, in Sächisch there is even the motto: "*De weeschn besieschn de hardn*" = *Die "weichen" (Konsonanten) besiegen die "harten"* which means "The weak (consonants) conquer the hard." For example, the consonant *d* is so weak that it is often replaced by a *t* which causes *leider* ('unfortunately') to be pronounced like *Leiter* ('leader' or 'ladder') (Lins 23). The consonant *g* is often pronounced differently than in other regions of Germany. It often sounds like *sch* or a rough *ch* (35).

There is also no difference between the *b* and *p* sounds. The German words *Gebäck* ('baked goods') and *Gepäck* ('luggage') are pronounced exactly the same, as well as *Bass* and *Pass* ('bass' and 'passport') (Lins 12). Frustration with understanding such weakened consonants and such a sloppy pronunciation has led to many jokes about the Sächisch dialect. For example:

*Was macht der Bäcker ebenso wie der Pfarrer?*

"What does the baker make or do just like the priest?"

The answer is *Bredchen/bredchen*; *Bredchen* (the noun) is Sächisch for *Brötchen* or 'biscuit' and *bredchen* (the verb) is Sächisch for *predigen* or 'preach' (Lins 12).

Other times, consonants like *p*, *b*, and *f* are even weaker and do not sound like themselves at all; rather, they are pronounced like a *w*. For example, the words *rauben* ('to rob') and *Raupen* ('bulldozers') both sound in Sächisch like *Rauwen* (Lins 12), and *Stiefel* or 'boot' sounds like *Stiewel* (31). Below, in Figure 2, there are more examples of consonant weakening:

Figure 2: Examples of Consonant Weakening in Sächisch		
German	English	Sächisch Pronunciation
Ober	head waiter	<i>awer</i>
Oper	opera	<i>awer</i>
diebisch	thieving	<i>diewisch</i>
typisch	typical	<i>diewisch</i>
Käfer	beetle	<i>Käwer</i>
Teufel	devil	<i>Tiewel</i>
Ofen	oven	<i>Owen</i>

Consonant weakening in the Sächisch dialect is even more extensive than has been explained up to this point, but it will not be discussed in greater depth in this short overview.

Sächisch also alters the pronunciation of vowels as well as consonants. Vowels are pronounced more rounded (Lins 9). The term ‘rounded vowel’ refers to the shape of the lips when the sound is produced, i.e. whether the lips are rounded like in ‘who’ or spread like in ‘cheese’ (Fromkin 238). In Sächisch, the vowel *a* is often pronounced like an *o*. The words *schwarz* (‘black’) and *Wahrheit* (‘truth’) are then pronounced *schworz* and *wohrheit*. In other instances, *a* is pronounced like *u*. Then, *Nadel* (‘needle’) sounds like *Nudel* (‘noodle’) and *lassen* (‘to let’) sounds like *lussen* (Lins 9).

In addition to the phonetic differences like the aforementioned consonant substitutions and rounded vowels, Sächisch has a general relaxed pronunciation that often allows entire words to run together, thus causing more aggravation to visitors in the region. Simple examples of this phenomenon are the merging of *Arm* ('arm') and *voll* ('full') to create the Sächisch word *Arfel* ('armful'). Likewise, Saxons say *Hamfel* (*Handvoll*, 'handful') and *Mumfel* (*Mundvoll*, 'mouthful'). Saxons also commonly replace the common end syllable *-ben* with *m*. For instance, the adverb *oben* ('above') would then be *oom* (the vowel modification is simply a result of the vowel rounding that was discussed earlier) and the verb *nehmen* ('to take') would be shortened to *näm* (Lins 11). The omission of such endings leads to further confusion for outsiders and can cause some expressions to be practically unrecognizable. For example:

Sächisch:      *'s Läm äm näm, wie 's Läm äm is.*

German:        Das Leben eben nehmen, wie das Leben eben ist.

English:        Take life exactly, as life exactly is.    (Lins 12)

In summary, it is easy to see how the various phonetic differences in the Sächisch dialect have contributed to difficulties in communicating for foreigners as well as for native German-speaking visitors to the regions where Sächisch is spoken and have contributed to the decreased prestige of a once prominent dialect.

## Low German

Low German (also known as *Niedersächsisch*, *Niederdeutsch*, or more commonly *Plattdeutsch* in German) is a common regional dialect in northern German states such as Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia, Hamburg, Bremen, Schleswig-Holstein, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Saxony-Anhalt and Brandenburg, as well as eastern parts of the Netherlands (Hahn). The name ‘Low German’ actually refers to the geographic characteristics of these areas. Low German is general spoken in the northern coastal regions which are relatively flat compared to mountainous southern Germany where High German originated. Actually, “*platt*” in the frequently-used German term for Low German, *Plattdeutsch*, literally means ‘flat’ (Mosel 63).

Phonetically, Low German distinguishes itself from High German by having not been affected by the High German Consonant Shift (*zweite oder hochdeutsche Lautverschiebung*). The High German Consonant Shift was a general linguistic shift in the southern German dialects which began using voiced plosives instead of voiceless plosives beginning in the Sixth Century (Wolff, Gerhard 59). As seen on the German International Phonetic Alphabet chart (Figure 3), the plosive phonemes are *p, t, k, b, d, g*. Plosives are consonants that are produced by briefly and completely blocking the airstream in the mouth (Fromkin 232). From the Sixth to Eleventh Centuries inhabitants of southern Germany began to replace the old voiceless plosives *p, t, and k* with either the affricates *pf, ts, and kx* or the fricatives *f, s, ç, and x*. The voiced plosives *b, d, and g* were then replaced by the voiceless plosives *p, t, and k* (Eisenberg 349). While the High

German Consonant Shift may seem quite complicated, it is merely a substitution of consonants in the spoken language. For example, the German word for ‘horse’ is *Pferd*; however, the Low German pronunciation is *Perd* since northern German dialects are not affected by the linguistic shift which replaced the *p* with the affricate *pf* in the standard pronunciation.

Figure 3: The German IPA Consonant Chart

Type of Articulation		Area of Articulation							
		Bilabial	Labiodental	Aveolar	Post-Aveolar	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Glottal
Plosive	voiced	<b>p</b>		<b>t</b>		<b>k</b>			
	non-voiced	<b>b</b>		<b>d</b>		<b>g</b>			
Nasal	voiced	<b>m</b>		<b>n</b>		<b>ɲ</b>			
	non-voiced								
Fricative	voiced		<b>v</b>	<b>z</b>	□	<b>j</b>			
	non-voiced		<b>f</b>	<b>s</b>	□	<b>ç</b>	<b>x</b>	□	<b>h</b>
Lateral				<b>l</b>					
Trill				<b>r</b>				<b>R</b>	

chart modeled after *Phonetik, Phonologie und Graphemik fürs Examen*, page 32

As seen in Figure 1, there are several dialects in the Low German dialect realm, such as Niederfrankisch, North Niederfrankisch, Schleswigisch, Holsteinisch, Mecklenburgisch, East Low German, Märkisch-Brandenburgisch, Ostfälisch, and Westfälisch. While it is important to note that each of these dialects have unique characteristics that distinguish each of them, this paper will only discuss the Westfälisch and Berlinisch dialects.

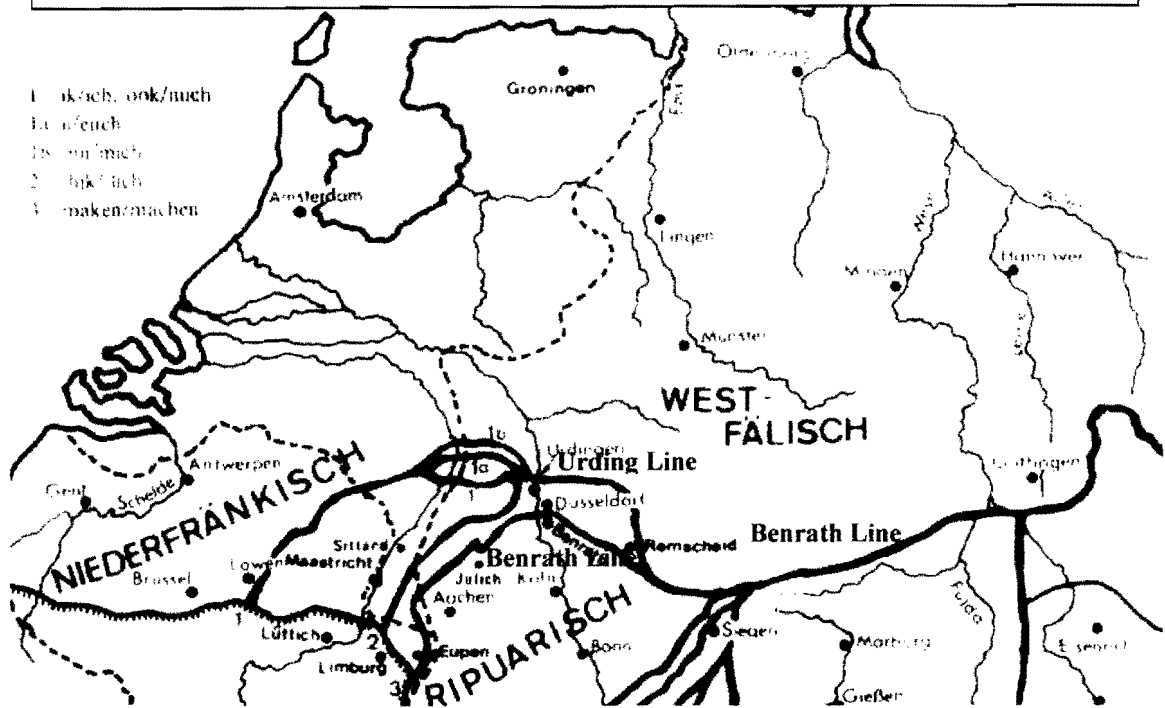
## Westfälisch

Westfälisch is a Low German dialect which is spoken throughout the majority of North Rhine-Westfalia, a northwestern German state near the Dutch border (Peters 2646). Although Standard High German is mainly heard throughout this area today, there are still traces of the Westfälisch dialect, especially within older, rural populations (2647).

The Westfälisch dialect distinguishes itself from other Low German dialects by its preservation of the Middle Low German vowels (Knoop). An example of this is the Westfälisch inclination towards the long *a* sound; the German word for sheep or *Schaf* is pronounced with the long rounded velar *a* which is produced by raising the back of the tongue to the soft palate. The phonetic spelling of this Westfälisch pronunciation would be *Sch□p*. The use of the *p* instead of the High German fricative *f* is another example of the Low German influence in the region. Being a Low German dialect, Westfälisch remains unaffected by the High German Consonant Shift (Niebaum 220). In fact, the region's southern border is the High German Consonant Shift line which separates Low German (to the North) and High German dialects (to the South) (Peters 2543).

Another example of the long Middle Low German *a* in Westfälisch pronunciation is *machen*, the German verb meaning "to do" or "to make," which is phonetically represented as *māken* in Westfälisch (Niebaum 220). This linguistic difference is represented graphically by the Benrath isogloss in Figure 4 below (Peter 2646). An isogloss is a line on a linguistic map that divides one dialect geographically from another;

**Figure 4: the Benrath and Urding Isoglosses in the Westfälisch Dialect Realm**  
(map taken from the *Das Wörterbuch der Gemmenicher Mundart*)



for example, an isogloss on an American linguistic map might divide those who say “soda” from those who say “pop” (Fromkin 414). The Benrath isogloss is important in the German-speaking realm; it separates those, north of the isogloss, who say *māken*, and those, south of the isogloss, who say *machen*. As is apparent in Figure 4, the Westfälisch dialect area lies north of the Benrath Line. The dialect area also lies north of the Urding Line which separates those who, for ‘I’, say *ik* (north of the line) and *ich* (south of the line). These two lines are geographically very close to one another and often coincide (Wolff, Gerhard 58). These lines further represent the split between High and Low German; south of the line, *ik* was replaced by *ich* (or phonetically with the fricative, *iç*) during the High German Consonant Shift.



While Westfälisch shares many phonetic, orthographic, and stylistic characteristics with Low German like the Low German pronunciations of *das* ('the') and *was* ('what'), *dat* and *wat*, it also has many distinguishing characteristics. Phonetically, Westphalians tend not to pronounce *r*, especially before other consonants. For example, *warten* which means 'to wait' would be pronounced *wāten* (Peters 2647). In this example, the *r* seems to be swallowed up by the characteristic Westphalian long *a* sound. Westfälisch also has lexical differences; for instance, the word *Blage* which is not seen in the standard language is often used when referring to a child (*Kind*). The Westfälisch lexicon was also influenced by the historical sociolects that appeared in Westphalia like the Masematte, a dialect which was spoken by farm workers in certain quarters of the Westphalian city of Münster, or the secret languages of wandering merchants that traveled throughout the region up until the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (2648).

Over time, people in Westphalia have begun to use such unique regional vocabulary less and less. This is mainly because the standard High German pronunciation is viewed as being more prestigious and educated. Foreseeing that the Westfälisch dialect might eventually disappear, there are groups of people who believe that it is a part of their culture that should be preserved. Due to their preservation efforts, Westfälisch should survive at least one more generation (Peters 2648).

## Berlinisch

While the many regions of the German-speaking world have distinct dialects, these regions are often further differentiated by very localized linguistic characteristics. In some cases, dialects can be broken down into to sub-groups that are as small as a city or even a city neighborhood. Certain cities, like Cologne and Vienna, are large and influential enough that they have altered the language of the surrounding area and have even developed their own dialects. The most famous city dialect is found in Berlin, Germany's capital.

Along with a unique history, Berlin also has a unique way of utilizing many orthographic, grammatical, and phonetic eccentricities. While Berlinisch is a Low German dialect, much of its vocabulary comes from Standard High German, and the origins of Berlinisch orthography are as diverse as its population. This mix of High and Low German sometimes results in both dialects existing simultaneously within this city dialect. For example, both the High and Low German pronunciations for certain words like *Pfote* ('paw;' High: *Fote*; Low: *Pote*) can be heard within Berlin (Meyer 37). Other vocabulary stems from Jewish German (*Judendeutsch*) and Hebrew. Such vocabulary includes *Mischpocke* ('family relations'), *Schabbes* (*Sonnabend* or 'Saturday evening'), and *Schaute* ('Idiot') (Schildt 2318). Still other words come from the thieves' slang (*Rotwelsch* or *Gaunersprache*) like *ausbaldowern* (*auskundschaften*, 'to reconnoiter') (Meyer 37). In addition to these influences, Polish-, Italian-, French-, Dutch-, Slavish-, and English-speaking immigrants influenced the orthography of the greater Berlin area

(Meyer 38). Berlinisch was not only influenced by other languages and German dialects; it also had its own influence on the German language by introducing new words like *Radau* ('scuffle'), *Radaubruder* ('troublemaker'), *Klamausk* ('hullabaloo'), and *Fatzke* ('arrogant person'), which originated in Berlinisch slang and were adopted by the rest of the language (Meyer 31).

While much of the Berlinisch vocabulary is unique to the city and its diverse population, the Berlinisch grammar is strictly based on Low German (Meyer 62). As Berlin industrialized in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, farmers began to move to the city, bringing the Low German dialects with them (Schildt 2317). They brought with them the typical Low German pronunciation *icke*, *dit*, and *wat* (*Ich*, 'I'; *das* 'the'; and *was*, 'what') that are characteristic of Berlinisch today (Topf). Another example of this Low German influence is the tendency to use the dative personal pronoun *mir* ('me') regardless of whether the case calls for the dative form *mir* or the accusative form *mich* (Schildt 2316). There is a saying concerning this phenomenon, "*Der Berliner sagt immer mir, auch wenn es richtig ist*" ('The Berliner always says *mir*; also when it is correct') (Meyer 25). The accusative personal pronoun *mich* is never used (Meyer 25). This also holds true for the second person *du* form. For example:

Standard German:	<i>Ich erinnere <b>mich</b> daran.</i>	<i>Ich liebe <b>dich</b>.</i>
Berlinisch:	<i>Ich erinnere <b>mir</b> dran.</i>	<i>Ich liebe <b>dir</b>.</i>
English:	'I remember that.'	'I love you.'

These are obvious misuses of the dative pronouns *mir* and *dir*.

While Berliners often overuse their dative pronouns, they overuse the accusative case in general and rarely use the genitive case with nouns, similar to the Bairisch and Schwäbisch dialects (Meyer 25). In High German, the genitive case is used to indicate ownership. In English, the genitive case is depicted by adding an apostrophe and *s* at the end of the word which is taking ownership. Figure 5 shows both the standard High German formation of the genitive case as well as the Berlinisch alternative case which utilizes the dative preposition *von* ('from' or 'of') with an accusative declination (Schildt 2318).

Figure 5  
Standard High German Genitive and Berlinisch *von* + Dative

Gender	Masculine	Feminine	Neutral	Plural
Genitive	Der Hund des Mannes	Der Hund der Frau	Der Hund des Kindes	Der Hund der Kinder
English	The man's dog	The woman's dog	the child's dog	the children's dog
Berlinisch	Der Hund von den Mann	Der Hund von die Frau	Der Hund von das Kind	Der Hund von die Kinder

The pronunciation of Berlinisch is as unique as its grammar. Vowels have distinctive pronunciations. The common diphthong *au* is often voiced like a long *o*. For example, *laufen* ('to run') and *rauchen* ('to smoke') are pronounced *lofen* and *rochen*. Another diphthong, *ei*, is pronounced like a long *ee*; for instance, *keiner* ('none') would be pronounced *keener*, and *Beine* ('leg') would likewise be *Beene* (Topf). Another feature of the Berliners' pronunciation is their tendency to pronounce *g* like the German *j* (which is pronounced like a *y* in English), resulting in words like *Rellijohn* instead of *Religion* ('Religion') (Meyer 155). Other times, the consonant *g* is pronounced like a *ch*. For instance, the common greeting in Berlin is *Jutn Dach!* or *Jutn Tach!*, instead of the usual Standard High German *Guten Tag!* ('Good Day!') (84).

Another key characteristic of the Berlinisch dialect is the speaker's inclination towards lisping. This is most evident when pronouncing words with a double *s*, for instance *Fussel* ('fuzz') (Meyer 17). Berliners today speak very fast; their almost brash or barking delivery has earned them the term *Berliner Schnauzer* ('Berlin mouther') (Topf). While according to some linguists (like Georg Cornelissen from the Bonn Office for Regional Studies '*Rheinische Landeskunde*'), the Berlinisch dialect is dying out, but many Berliners continue to maintain regional peculiarities in the language (Wasserab). Unlike Schwäbisch, Berlinisch has always been a language of the proletariat. While it is seldom heard in the palaces of Potsdam or the offices of the Bundestag, it is often heard on the streets of Berlin today (Topf).

## Conclusion

This paper has discussed the major differences between High German and Low German and briefly described five dialect groups, Bairisch, Schwäbisch, Sächsisch, Westfälisch and Berlinisch. These are just a small selection of the most prevalent and pronounced German dialects, all of which can be looked at in much more detail as well as be divided into multiple sub-groups. There are also German-speaking communities around the globe in places like France, Russia, Kazakhstan, Argentina, and the United States that each have their unique way of speaking.

When planning to visit or interact with members of a German community, it would be advisable to research the dialect of that area in advance. While it may be difficult to find dialect books, dictionaries, lexicons, and atlases outside of the German-speaking world, there are some universally available resources such as the “Dialektatlas” on the *Deutsch Welle* website ([www6.dw-world.de/de/dialect.php](http://www6.dw-world.de/de/dialect.php)) which includes audio examples of German dialects in addition to written explanations.

Though it is still important to be aware of the regional variations of the German language, this knowledge was more important in years gone by before advancements in mass communication began to dilute and normalize dialects. Due to such influxes of supra-regional communication and media which are broadcast in the Standard High German, many German dialects have become increasingly less prevalent since the end of the Second World War (Niebaum 219). Even though some northern dialects are threatening

extinction, there are still many communities that utilize dialects in their daily speech. This is especially true in southern Germany, Austria, and Switzerland where dialects continue to thrive and are considered by many locals to be the preferred language of communication and interaction (Wassab).

Every person has his or her own way of speaking; they differentiate themselves in speech and writing from others through their voice and their spokespersonship, through peculiarities in their pronunciation, through their handwriting and through their choice of vocabulary and grammatical resources (Duden 28). People in specific regions often share peculiarities in their speech from childhood onwards. The German-speaking world is filled with many such regions. Language is a vital part of a multi-cultural world; therefore, the linguistic diversity like that found in the German language should be preserved and respected.

While it may be considered rude to attempt to mimic a given dialect, travelers spending an extended period of time or even moving to a new region may naturally, and even inadvertently, begin to imitate characteristics of the regional language. In all cases, it is considerate to correctly use regional greetings like the Bairisch *Grüß Gott*. When planning to visit or interact with members of a German community, it would be advisable to research the dialect of that community in advance. Locals will appreciate your better understanding of the language they use, and you as a traveler will be thankful that you can better understand the language of the area.

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